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20. TAXONOMIC STATUS OF *PSITTACULA INTERMEDIA* (ROTHSCHILD)

While commending the authors of the recent paper 'On the taxonomic status of *Psittacula intermedia* (Rothschild)' (Sane *et al.* 1987) for undertaking an interesting study on biochemical characteristics of four species of Indian parakeets to understand their taxonomic affinities, with special reference to the little-known Rothschild's Parakeet, I cannot refrain from commenting on certain points presented in the paper.

1. The presence or absence of the wing—patch has been given too much importance in sex—distinction in *Psittacula intermedia*, especially when it may be present or absent or obsolete in one or both sexes in the allied species. Thus, the authors conclude (p. 128, para 4), solely on the basis of the absence of the wing—patch in two captive adult male specimens, "that contrary to the assumption of Biswas (1959), the 6 skins of adult *P. intermedia* in the collection of AMNH are all females", in spite of the fact that they all have plum—coloured heads! I should be interested to know about the colour of the heads of the two adult males of Sane's collection, one skinned and in BNHS collection and the other alive, and of the subadult female, also alive.

2. The authors write in the same para: "It is not clear to us as to how Biswas (loc.cit.) and others before him

identified the all—green seventh skin in AMNH as an immature specimen of *intermedia* since it could as well be that of *himalayana*". Compare this with what I had written in my 1959 paper (p. 559): "... the seventh ... is an immature specimen being green all over, ... Incidentally, it may be added that this specimen has as long a wing as that of the longest—winged male specimen, and it matches well with immature examples of *P. himalayana*, both in coloration and in size. I am thus led to consider it as an immature specimen of *P. himalayana* ..."! I wish the authors had read my paper a little more carefully.

3. In Table 1 (p. 128), the wing measurement 168 given for a paratype, should be 158 (Biswas 1959, p. 561, Table 1). It is strange that the item no. 3 in the same Table is given with wing—measurement of 153/151 and the bill, 21.5, although these figures when measured in the living bird were 161 and 21 respectively.

4. It is also noted that the authors gave no importance to certain other important characters such as the colours of the crown, the under wing—coverts and the tips of central rectrices.

November 17, 1987.

BISWAMOY BISWAS

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21. PIED CRESTED CUCKOO *CLAMATOR JACOBINUS* —
THE HARBRINGER OF THE MONSOON

In the Kathiawad peninsula in Gujarat, everything revolves around the success or failure of the monsoon. The migratory Pied Crested Cuckoo is associated with the advent of the monsoon in the region.

Very few birds migrate to India from Africa. The Pied Crested Cuckoo is one of them. Coming with the monsoon winds, it crosses the Arabian Sea with the favourable southwest wind and returns to Africa with the northwest winds in October—November. On both the ocean cross-

ings it thus takes full advantage of the prevailing favourable winds. There are not many records from the Oman and Mekran coasts, and the bird presumably flies more directly over the Arabian Sea.

I have always looked forward to the arrival of the season's first Pied Crested Cuckoo, and have invariably first heard the bird calling at night while flying high overhead. For the last 7 years I have kept a record of these dates, which are as follows:

- 18 June 1981 – First heard at Hingolghadh.
 5 June 1982 – Full moonlight. Heard calling at 2300 hrs
 7 June 1982 – Heard calling at 2300 hrs.
 8 June 1982 – Moonlight clear night. Heard calling – and flying overhead west to east – monsoon over Kerala and Madras.
 9 June 1983 – Heard calling and flying high overhead at 0020 hrs.
 2 June 1984 – Heard calling early in the morning at 0315 hrs
 Monsoon current over Kerala since 31 May 1984. Weak current.
 3 June 1984 – Heard calling and flying high overhead at 2330 hrs.
 4 June 1986 – Heard calling and flying high overhead early in the morning at 0330 hrs
 4 June 1987 – Calling and flying high overhead at 2310 hrs. Monsoon over Kerala and Goa.

Every time I have heard the call, the cuckoo was flying from west to east. This is the normal direction for it to migrate from Africa into the Indian subcontinent. I have never heard it calling and flying in any other direction in all these years.

Since some years the numbers of Pied Crested Cuckoos in the Jasdán area have decreased. The scrub forest at Hingolghadh is getting sparse. Grazing by cattle and goats and cutting of grass as well as trees and bushes for fuel have disturbed the bird life of the area. The Yellow Eyed Babbler, a former breeding resident, has not been seen for the last few years and the White Bellied Minivet is also on the way out. The *Acacia* groves have thinned out and with the loss of grass and bush cover the numbers of Common Babbler — the main hosts of the parasitic Pied Crested Cuckoo — have declined. Perhaps, the numbers of the Pied Crested Cuckoo have gone down in the Jasdán area due to these several factors.

June 16, 1987.

SHIVRAJKUMAR KHACHAR

22. FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER *HALCYON SMYRNENSIS* (LINNAEUS)

At 1115 hrs on 1 January 1987, I saw a Whitebreasted Kingfisher on the parapet of a nullah near my house in Udaipur, Rajasthan. The bird had a frog in its beak. It started beating the frog on the parapet, then flew to a tree in the compound of our house and started beating the frog on a branch. I tried to photograph it, but it was disturbed and flew further up into dense foliage.

It beat the frog on the branch for half an hour. At 1145 hrs it started swallowing the frog. It took 10 minutes to swallow it and in the meanwhile it excreted four times. While swallowing, it was breathing heavily and this state remained for 15 minutes. When the legs of the frog disap-

peared into its gullet it remained in a stiff position. Meanwhile some bird of prey flew overhead and many birds either ducked or flew away, but the kingfisher remained still.

To see the reaction of the bird I beat the trunk of the tree and made noises, but it did not move. The bird remained in this state for four minutes. Then it started moving its head, and gradually its breathing became less heavy. After 20 minutes of the swallowing of the frog the kingfisher flew away.

January 20, 1987

RAZA TEHSIN

23. BLACK DRONGO *DICRURUS ADSIMILIS* NESTING ON ELECTRIC POLE

The Southern Black Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* (Bechstein) is known to nest generally on trees (Ali & Ripley 1972, Shukkur & Joseph 1980). However, we found a pair nesting on an electric pole in the Circuit house compound, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, even though there were a number of large sized suitable trees nearby.

The nest was located in a small space between the horizontal and vertical sections of the cemented pole, just below the lower power line. It was first observed on 21 July 1987 with an adult bird brooding in the nest. On 24th July we noted two fledglings. We photographed the nest and a fledgling on 29th July. They remained in the nest till about 29th August. On 27th and 28th August, we noted

only one parent feeding the young till as late as 1905 hrs (sunset that day was at 1827 hrs) by bringing flying insects attracted to the nearby light.

We cannot understand whether this rather unusual nest site provides any special advantage to the bird, especially when there are suitable trees nearby. Could it be that the bird selected the location to take advantage of abundant insects that were being attracted to the lights, so that it could feed its young with relatively less effort?

December 17, 1987.

K.S.R. KRISHNA RAJU
 U.V. BAIRAGI RAJU